

Murdo, Patricia

From: McNeely, Gretchen [gmcneely@montana.edu]
Sent: Friday, January 27, 2006 4:02 PM
To: Murdo, Patricia
Cc: McNeely, Gretchen
Subject: Why should the State of Montana have a Board of Nursing?

Dear Ms. Murdo – I have been informed that you are collecting input for the SJR35 Legislative Committee regarding why the State of Montana needs a Board of Nursing. A study of this issue was part of my doctoral dissertation in 1993. I looked at the issue from a historical perspective and I would like to share with the legislative committee a little bit of what I learned from that study. In addition, I served as a member of the Montana Board of Nursing from 2000-2004, so I am familiar with the vital work of the board.

In the early part of the 20th century, many women (and a few men) were holding themselves out to the public as “nurses.” Some of them were formally “trained” and others were not. The unsuspecting public had no idea when they were being taken care of by a “nurse” if he/she was “trained” or not. In other words, the public was not protected. In order to provide protection for the public, state legislatures all over the country began to pass laws/statutes to require that nurses be “registered” so that the public could be assured that the nurses who cared for them and the members of their families were “trained” in an approved school and licensed through passing an examination to practice competently and safely and to be called “registered nurses” (a protected title). The first such laws were passed in 1903 in North Carolina, New York, New Jersey and Virginia. In 1913, Montana passed such a law and today all states have such laws. These laws were referred to as Nurse Practice Acts and they provided for a Board of Nursing in each state.

The Montana Board of Nursing was initially named by Governor Samuel V. Stewart in 1913 to carry out the functions of protecting the public by assuring that all “registered nurses” had graduated from an approved nursing program and had passed an examination to demonstrate their ability to provide safe and competent care to patients in Montana. The Nurse Practice Act that provided for this board was Chapter 50 of the Session Laws of the 13th Legislative Assembly in 1913. To this day, the Montana Board of Nursing approves nursing schools in the state which was one of the original functions of the board. Another function of the board in 1913 was to conduct the examination for the graduates of the approved nursing programs. Today, graduates take the National Council of State Boards of Nursing licensing examination referred to as NCLEX-RN or “the State Boards.” After graduates of approved schools of nursing take and pass the licensing examination, they are also asked some questions regarding their background. If their backgrounds include felony charges, the Screening Committee of the Board of Nursing investigates to be sure that the persons who are being licensed as “registered nurses” do not present a safety risk to the public. Graduates can then be licensed and are required to follow the Board of Nursing Rules and Regulations regarding their nursing practice. These Rules and Regulations provide another safety net for the public to assure that the licensed “registered nurse” is providing safe and competent nursing care. When nurses are not providing safe and competent care, they can be reported to the board, and again the Screening Committee investigates the complaints about these nurses and can put nurses on probation or take away their licenses, if found to be unsafe or incompetent, all in the pursuit of providing safe and competent care to the public.

There is no group of dedicated people who are more capable of providing these functions to protect the Montana citizenry than the nurses and public members of the Board of Nursing. All states rely on Boards of Nursing to provide these functions which are necessary to protect the citizens of every state. Why would Montana legislators think that this is not important? I am sure that when they and their families are ill or injured and require the services of a nurse, they want to be assured that the individual caring for them is safe and competent to do so. Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Gretchen

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